

IDEA-0611

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MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT : Agency U-2 Major Accident Summary

1. This memorandum is forwarded for your information per your request.

2. From the commencement of U-2 training in 1956 until December 1961, there have been ten major accidents involving Agency-owned aircraft. As a result of these accidents, there were five fatalities, eight aircraft were destroyed and two were returned to service after repairs.

3. It should be noted that six of the accidents resulted from incidents occurring below 1,000 feet; two from pilot error and possible hypoxia; one from unknown causes. The aircraft involved in the 1 May 1960 incident has been included as a major accident although conclusive details concerning it are not available and the cause must be categorized as unknown. A brief summary of each accident is attached.

4. As of December 1961 the average number of hours of U-2 flying time for Agency-controlled pilots is:

CA 1 - DB

CA 2 - CV

CA 3 - TR

CA 4 - DB

CA 5 - DB

5. SAC U-2 accidents have not been treated in this document since we do not have full and complete details on their mishaps immediately available.

DESCRIPTION:

CA 1 - DB (2 1st RS)

CA 2 - CV (2 1st RS)

CA 3 - TR (2 1st RS)

(Signed) Richard M. Bissell, Jr.

RICHARD M. BISSELL, JR.
Deputy Director
(Plans)

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Attachment

Summary of Accidents

25X1A

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Signature recommended:

Acting Chief, DPD-DD/P

EO/DPD:JNMCM:jr (5 Jan 62)

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Attachment to IDEA 3611

1. 15 May 1956 - U-2 Number 345:

Both pogo failed to release after take-off. The pilot followed established procedures to release pogo. The left pogo released on the first attempt. On the second attempt to release the right pogo the pilot failed to maintain adequate airspeed and altitude. The aircraft stalled in a right turn and hit the ground, fatally injuring the pilot and demolishing the aircraft. The most probable cause was pilot error.

2. 31 August 1956 - U-2 Number 345: 356

The pilot made his initial climb after take-off in a nose high, low airspeed altitude. At approximately 40-50 feet the left wing dropped and the aircraft stalled into the ground. The aircraft was destroyed and the pilot was fatally injured. The probable cause of this accident was pilot error with possible loss of night vision as a contributing factor.

3. 17 September 1956 - U-2 Number 346:

Approximately eight minutes after take-off the aircraft was seen by two pilots in a T-33 and four pilots in a flight of RCAF F-86's at 35,000 feet. About five seconds after passing the F-86's and 500 feet above them the U-2 disintegrated and fell. The pilot was fatally injured. The cause of this accident could not be definitely determined beyond an initial failure of the right wing. Metal fatigue over stress or high internal wing pressures were suggested as possible causes of the wing failure. The possibility of sabotage was thoroughly investigated and sufficient evidence was produced to rule out sabotage as a cause.

4. 19 December 1956 - U-2 Number 357:

Excessive oxygen consumption was noted in the first hour by the pilot. After approximately four and one-half hours of flight he made an emergency descent and allowed the airspeed to exceed the placard limit, causing buffet and loss of control. The pilot was blown out as the aircraft disintegrated. The primary cause was pilot error; the contributing cause was a leak in the oxygen system. The pilot failed to take corrective action and return to base prior to becoming hypoxic at altitude.

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5. 4 April 1957 - U-2 Number 341:

A Lockheed pilot on a test flight planned to fly one hour at normal operating temperature and then one hour at 20° Centigrade above normal. Radio communication was lost. The fatally injured pilot and demolished aircraft were found 72 hours later. The official accident investigation concluded that the cause of the accident was hypoxia of the pilot from an undetermined cause. Engine flameout due to hydraulic system failure and subsequent loss of cabin pressurization, malfunctioning cockpit seals, oxygen system and/or personal equipment were considered the most probable reason for the hypoxia.

6. 24 September 1959 - U-2C Number 360:

On GCA final approach [] the aircraft flamed out due to fuel starvation and made an emergency landing on a prepared dirt strip. The pilot was not injured and the aircraft was repaired. This was one of the first fuel consumption profiles flown in the J-75 equipped U-2 at Detachment C. The primary cause was supervisory and pilot error in not maintaining the fuel profile.

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7. 5 April 1960 - U-2 Number 349:

On return from an overflight of China the pilot lost radio beacon reception at 20,000 feet. He descended through haze and smoke to 6000 feet, but was unable to find the base. While attempting a climb out towards his alternate the engine flamed out due to fuel starvation and a successful crash landing was made. The pilot was not injured and the aircraft was repaired. The primary cause was pilot error; the contributing factor was failure of airborne radio aids.

8. 1 May 1960 - U-2 Number 360:

During an overflight of the USSR the aircraft experienced difficulty and was "downed" in the Sverdlovsk area. The pilot was captured and the aircraft destroyed. There are two basic hypotheses for the incident: one, engine malfunction which resulted from climbing the aircraft to excessive altitude (damage sustained to the aircraft probably occurred at lower altitudes); and, two, SAM damage at altitude to the engine turbine blade which resulted in engine overheating and finally flameout.

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9. 19 March 1961 - U-2C Number 351:

25X1C While making a night transition landing the pilot [redacted]
25X1C [redacted] attempted a "go around". The pilot permitted the wing to drop and the aircraft struck the ground inverted and was demolished by fire. The pilot was fatally injured. The primary cause was believed to be pilot error in that he lost control of his aircraft.

10. 14 September 1961 - U-2 Number 353:

25X1D After a [redacted] mission the aircraft stalled on final approach and struck the ground short of the runway. As it came to rest on the runway the aircraft burned beyond repair, but the pilot escaped uninjured. The primary cause was pilot error. Contributing causes were pilot fatigue and possible abnormal turbulence off the approach end of the runway.